

LIFE ABOARD AN OCEAN RACER

How many of us wonder what it would be like to race a yacht in the open sea? By courtesy of the skipper of this year's Queenscliff to Port Lincoln classic winner, Jack Williams, we are able to tell you something of the hardships endured and the pleasures enjoyed.

Mr. Williams kindly loaned "Water Sport" his ship's log, from which this story is written.

On Christmas Day, 1967 the last member of the racing crew of Canopus arrived at the Sandringham Yacht Club.

They arrived just in time to enjoy a fine Christmas dinner, superbly prepared for us by the club caterers, aboard "Archenar."

It was a fine gesture and completed the start to a fine race.

We enjoyed the company of yachtsmen awaiting to contest the Queenscliff to Davenport race.

This was to be started the day after the 'major race.'

Everyone was in the best of Christmas spirits with the South Australian crews swapping cans of beer with the Tasmanian crews.

We left Sandringham for Portsea at 4.15 p.m. in perfect sailing conditions, with flat seas and the sun shining.

Right mood

Our whole crew was right in the mood for a race.

Canopus arrived at dusk and anchored offshore in slightly choppy conditions.

The wind had come around to the north-east and looked like favouring the fast runners for the race next morning.

On Tuesday, December 27 the crew was up and out of bed with a simple "wakey wakey" at 5.30 a.m. from the skipper.

A very light north-easterly was moving at about 8 knots.

At 7.30 a.m. the anchor was stowed and lashed in-board, and we were heading for the starting line.

All the yachts replied over the radio, complying with the rules of the race (all radios be operative).

The start

At 8 a.m. "the start" — crossing the line with Four Winds II — we were the first of the fleet to set a spinnaker and left the rest of the fleet standing.

We gradually drew away from Four Winds II and had a clear lead through the tip.

This lead gradually in-

creased on the whole fleet except for Archenar.

We decided to tack down wind and to go carefully and hide our jibs so that she would not catch on.

Our effort was quite worth while.

We rounded Cape Otway at about midnight, cutting in fine and taking running fixes on the light.

A sudden change in the wind from north-east to south-east caused quite a reshuffle in the flat.

We managed to keep our lead on the fast runners — so down with the spinnaker up with the large Genoa, and hard on the wind.

As we rounded the coast navigation became quiet, but hard winds meant we now needed our position on the chart to assess the best tack.

Revels

Then at last, conditions which Canopus revels in — flat seas and moderate head winds.

At daybreak Archenar, astern on the horizon, was the only yacht in sight.

The winds were fluctuating from the south-west, west, north-west and back.

We continually tacked to take advantage of the wind shifts and our navigation was almost continuous.

Conditions were now becoming uncomfortable.

It was 5.30 a.m. and a dense fog had set in.

We were sailing at our maximum speed right down the centre of the steamer traffic.

It was a little unnerving, and the crew was very tense.

At 7.30 the fog lifted with everyone giving a sigh of relief.

The helmsman was using all instruments to get the best from the yacht to windward.

Cold

The day was becoming very cold and overcast.

Winds were starting to rise and were reading up to 35 m.p.h.

At 7 p.m. we were close to Lady Peray Island and a strong westerly set in. We changed jibs and went about on a starboard tack.

It was now 10.15 p.m., and we were twenty miles

off the island, going about on the port tack.

Conditions below were a little rough, with seas building up and the wind a very strong westerly, setting us inshore.

On Thursday, December 28, we were passing Cape Nelson astern.

Our bearing was taken. At 6 a.m. the wind was dropping and the Genoa was set again to maintain maximum speed.

The south-wester was about eighteen knots and was working around to the west.

Winds

At 8 p.m. the winds strength increased and we

changed to a smaller jib.

The radio sched indicated we had drawn away from the rest of the fleet, with Naranda our nearest rival. Four Winds and Jona, the two Victorian yachts, had withdrawn from the race.

The seas were now consistently rough. Cooking and navigation were coming more uncomfortable.

The crew was in good physical condition and high morale.

Tried to maximise on the loss of ground due to set, by taking a long leg to sea at approximately 2 p.m.

At 6 p.m. we sighted the Cape Northumberland light just enough to get a fix.

It now became obvious that there was less loss due to set, in the deeper water.

Our Walker electronic log stopped, probably due to seaweed being caught in the impeller.

Confused

The wind was now 35 m.p.h. and the seas were becoming more confused.

On Friday, December 29, with Cape Banks abeam at 3 a.m., the wind was easing off to 25 m.p.h.

At 6 p.m. we had fried chicken for breakfast while we went about on the starboard tack to sea and deep water again.

We were astern of Cape Buffour at 9 a.m.

Conditions were rough, with seas building up strongly.

At 9.10 a.m. we tacked to starboard, estimating our set.

Again at 11 a.m. we tacked to the port, estimating our set once more.

Now over the Continental Shelf with an eighteen knot wind, we set full sail and Genoa again.

Winds were holding west through west-north-west to west-south-west.

Canopus now tacked to the port.

The seas were now rough with a long swell

She must have picked us up on her radar and skirted around us.

At 6.30 p.m. the Cape Willoughby light was in sight.

I was now feeling much more relaxed as the visibility was now good enough to see the passage.

Winds were still over 50 m.p.h., but we hoped to get shelter in the passage.

At 7.30 p.m. the crew were very tired.

On Sunday, December 31, the sailing conditions were better — wind strength was fifteen to eighteen knots.

Shipping

Investigator Strait was busy with shipping.

At 4 a.m. the first watch came up after a good seven hours sleep.

The Althorps Islands came into sight at 6 a.m., and we were still sailing at our maximum speed.

The radio sched at 8 a.m. indicates that we have an unbeatable lead with Lincoln Hope retired at Robe, Naranda retired in Encounter Bay, and the nearest boat eighty miles astern.

It now meant another day of sailing to the finish line.

Tide

At 11 a.m. we were abeam of Emmes Reef after being set back by a strong tide.

With a fifteen knot wind we slightly eased the sheets.

The radio sched was now broken off.

Our estimated time of arrival was 9.30 p.m.

The wind had now increased to eighteen knots, with our speed being eight knots.

The crew decided to shave and clean up at 8 p.m. — we were now passing through Cape Donnington. Commodore Allan Smith of R.S.A.Y.S. was communicating by radio with us.

At 9.30 p.m. we finished the race with sirens and spot lights directed upon us.

We cleaned up the deck, removed sheets and sails, and motored up to the wharf with all the crew on deck.

I would like to thank all those people who helped us in many ways.

